

Editorial

Freeway contrasts simply amazing

I still can't get over the contrast between how Ahwatukee residents view the proposed South Mountain Freeway and how Chandler residents felt about the Santan Freeway.

Last December, Chandler folks by the thousands turned out for a freeway party that signified quicker commutes, more retail and thousands of jobs. The Santan had completed its journey through Chandler and was half-way home to meeting up with the Superstition Freeway.

In Ahwatukee, locals are doing anything but throwing parties at the thought of the same freeway, Loop 202, extending through the community as it wraps around the mountain and meets up with I-10 in the West Valley. And enthusiasm about the freeway bringing more jobs, shopping or shortcuts to work?

Instead, we have the same freeway, but a completely different story. What went wrong with this picture?

In most of the news coverage it would seem that the Arizona Department of Transportation is on the hot seat. Forums are held and, at times, ADOT officials have to work to get a word in. They're the ones, after all, who are the bearers of the bad news that homes by the hundreds would have to be destroyed as the freeway cuts along the southern part of Ahwatukee and heads west.

But are ADOT officials really to blame?

Since the time the route was set in the 1980s Chandler officials saw the alignment on maps and did the most amazing thing: they kept development out of the path! What's more, they looked at how the future freeway would be a river of wealth and one day shuttle in shoppers and workers to the retail and employment centers that were planned along the Santan.

Even when home developers asked to build nearby, they were either moved back or sent elsewhere. And when developers asked to build in the path of the future Santan? I'd say it's safe to bet that the laughter is still echoing through City Hall.

Not so in Phoenix. With an estimated 375 to 1,035 homes in Ahwatukee alone slated to be torn down if the freeway goes through, it's pretty obvious that developers got an entirely different answer from Phoenix leaders.

I understand that sometime during the Symington administration that the road was "defunded." I doubt that meant the plan was wiped cleaned from the planning books. And if it was, how in the world is it now back in the plans and threatening to destroy homes and upset lives?

Instead, it would seem the operative word is backbone. Chandler had it when they were pressured to fill in their freeway route while Phoenix obviously did not.

It would also seem that ADOT and other Valley transportation leaders need to get some of that same gumption, live with the reality of the situation today, and start working on a plan in a *different locale* that better serves the Southeast Valley.

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